

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

PART SEVEN – HOW GOD MAY GIVE A HISTORY LESSON

The second half of the book of Daniel is on the face of it totally different from the first but there are intriguing connections. Much of Daniel's ministry in chapters 1-6 had involved interpreting the dreams and visions of the kings of Babylon and Persia. Now Daniel described his own dreams. He had witnessed to a succession of kings about their roles as rulers. He had urged Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius to let God be their king. Two had listened and one had not. His own dreams were still about the successive empires to come which would rise for a while and then fall. But they also looked beyond these empires to the coming kingdom of Christ and its final triumph.

Chapters 7-12 are a foreshadowing of another series of dreams given to John in Revelation. Each book helps us to understand the other. Daniel's dreams like John's begin with recognizable history but towards the end move into future unknown territory. The balance we need in understanding the dreams is to identify known history as far as we can but not push interpretation of the still mysterious parts.

The first dream is of 4 beasts which came out of the sea. It is reasonable to match them with the 4 empires which would rule Judah and the Middle East in succession. The lion could be Babylon which lasted from 626-539 BC and corresponded with the golden head of the statue in chapter 2. The bear suggests Medo-Persia which dominated from 539-331 BC and was also represented by the silver breast of the statue in chapter 2. The leopard moves fast as Greece led by Alexander the Great rapidly expanded her empire from Europe to North India within a very few years. Alexander died at the age of only 33 but his empire was later divided between his four generals. Two of these are relevant to Judah. One ruled Egypt and was referred to later as the King of the South. Another ruled Syria, and was called the King of the North. Sometimes they were allies and sometimes they fought. Judah was then the 'meat in the sandwich'. The bronze belly and thighs of the earlier statue point to the same empire. Rome, the fourth and terrifying beast, had been slowly expanding from its foundation in 753 BC but finally engulfed all of these kingdoms in 63 BC to become by far the largest and longest lasting of the powers to over-run Judah. It was presumably the legs of the iron in the statue. Rome would last in the West until 476 AD and as already anticipated in chapter 2, would be the birthplace of Christ and His eternal kingdom.(v.1-8)

The further beast had 10 horns, later in the chapter explained as 10 kings. This beast is similar to the one in Rev.13:1 which had 7 heads and 10 horns. Rome was built on 7 hills, each of which had a temple to a different Roman god. The 10th emperor, Vespasian, ruled at the time of the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. He may well be what Rev.13 was representing and perhaps this is what Daniel was anticipating. Jews and Christians suffered terribly at that time.(v.15-22)

Between the vision of these beasts in v.1-8 and the explanation in the later part of the chapter, is a glimpse of where God is when such things are happening on earth. First there is a picture of the Lord on His throne and reminder that He is in charge of the

universe and will one day judge sin. Those who terrorise on earth will one day have to face Him. Again there is a similarity to Rev.4. Both remind us that however tough things seem now, God is still King.(v.9-12)

A second representation of God is described as 'a Son of Man', a title often used for Jesus.(Matt.24:27,30,37,39,44) This vision could picture Jesus returning to heaven after completing His work on the cross and being appointed to rule on earth, first in us,(Mk.1:15) and then with us after His return,(Rev.20:4-6) taking control of all mankind.(v.13,14)

In the final part of the chapter the dream passes beyond known history to the future in which Christ's kingdom will be re-established on earth after the defeat of the last leader to rebel against God. On three occasions Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed by foreign conquerors.(586 BC, 162 BC and 60 AD) Each time the Lord would restore His people. Perhaps it will happen one more time before His final return?(v.23-27)

Daniel was emotionally overwhelmed by the insight into the future which God had given him. For the moment he kept it to himself.(v.28)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ON DANIEL, CHAPTER SEVEN

Q.1 With whom do you suppose Daniel eventually shared his dream? How would it have helped those who heard it?

Q.2 What could the Lord have meant by 'time, times and half a time'?(v.25) Why was the meaning not made absolutely clear?

Q.3 On what other occasions in the Bible does God give people a glimpse of the future? Why does He do it? What does He not tell us about what is to come?